

**Opening Statement  
Senate Aging Committee  
Chairman Grassley  
February 22, 1999**

Good Afternoon. I would like to bring the first hearing of the Aging Committee of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress to order.

When I took over as Chairman in January 1997, the beginning of the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress, my primary goal was to review the likely future financial status of the Social Security and Medicare programs and promote initiatives that will insure Baby Boomers and future generations enjoy health and income security as they age. I believe we've made great strides in this debate, however we are now two years closer to the retirement of the Baby Boom generation. The time has come to move ahead toward enact policies which will provide the tools to sustain our retirement programs for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We dedicated last year to a great debate about our Social Security program. In public and private forums across the country workers and retirees discussed their concerns, hopes and desires for the program which has been with us for over 60 years. Now we must forge ahead. The clock is still ticking and we need to advance to the next step toward saving Social Security.

As the debate progressed many of the plans to save Social Security include an "individual account" as part of the Social Security system. Possibly because of this, one of the themes which seemed to be echoed time and again during last year's debate was a concern that as policymakers work toward saving Social Security, women's unique needs for the program might be overlooked. There is no need for such concern.

I certainly believe that important issues facing women have not been satisfactorily addressed. Women have longer life spans and depend on Social Security for more years in retirement than men do. Women are more likely to move in and out of the workforce to raise children and care for elderly parents and they are more likely to have custody of children after divorce. Women tend to earn less than men because of years out of the workforce and the shrinking, but still prevalent, pay gap.

Today's hearing will examine the benefits women derive from the current Social Security program and the benefits women would realize under a system which would include an individual account component. We will hear from two panels of distinguished experts who will address these issues and more importantly, will offer possible solutions to problems women may face. On our first panel we will hear from Dr. Olivia Mitchell and Dr. Alicia Munnell. I would like to point out that Dr. Mitchell also testified at the first hearing of the Aging Committee in the last Congress. Dr. Mitchell, and indeed most of our panelists, may be more eager than anyone to save the Social Security program so that they won't have to keep coming up here to testify. [pause for laughter]

On the second panel we will hear from Dr. Robert Clark, Dr. Gene Steuerle and Dr. Mark Warshawsky. This panel will examine specific concerns that arise under individual accounts: investment behavior; divorce; and longevity. Each panelist will offer recommendations to address these issues in the design of an individual account component.